

РЕЦЕНЗІЇ

MICHAEL McFAUL

ADVANCING DEMOCRACY ABROAD: WHY WE SHOULD AND HOW WE CAN

ROWMAN AND LITTLEFIELD. LANHAM, NEW YORK AND PLYMOUTH, 2010, 288 p.

This is a book which combines explicit policy advocacy to the government of the United States with an academic analysis of democracy. The latter is intended to make a case for the legitimacy of the former – the promotion of democracy and its sponsorship abroad. The work is written for the general reader, American policy-makers and the 'specialist on democracy promotion'. McFaul describes himself as a political activist – promoting democracy- and also as a political scientist committed to 'rigorous social science standards' (p.xi). The work reveals an uneasy tension between academic analysis and policy advocacy, as the latter requires selecting and interpreting facts and opinions in support of policy priorities.

The early chapters of the book outline and criticise George W. Bush's Freedom Agenda and its failure as perceived by American opinion. McFaul acknowledges that the policy of democracy promotion failed in many countries and had significant 'democratic reversals' in others, he criticises the use of military force for democracy promotion and the policy of 'regime change'. He concedes that many Americans doubt whether democracy promotion furthered US interests and contend that it did not enhance security. He recognizes that many consider the threat of terrorism and nuclear proliferation to be of more importance; and he accepts that many argue that nation building at home in the USA should take priority over its export.

McFaul, nevertheless, argues that, under the right circumstances and with the right policies, the USA can and should promote democracy. 'Democracy' it is claimed gives rise to 'better government, more security, and economic development' (ix). Sponsoring democracy, he asserts, will strengthen not only American values but will also make Americans 'safer and richer'. An objective of the work is to 'rebuild the international legitimacy and domestic support needed to sustain democracy promotion for the long haul' (p. 24). Two final chapters detail changes needed in the policy of the United States and 'the actions required to further internationalise democracy promotion efforts' (p.24). As 'special assistant' to President Obama, the author indicates intellectual trends which might influence American foreign policy.

The case for democracy promotion, as set out by McFaul, is dependent on the advantages of democracy as a form of government to citizens as well as on the returns that democracy promotion abroad may bring to the United States. The arguments in the book are predicated on systems of government defined as electoral democracy and particularly the conditions necessary to promote pluralist liberal democracy; and frequent use is made of indexes constructed by Freedom House. However, such measures are more than conditions for the functioning of democracy as a political method, but define the type of society which can support it. This leaves the author open to the criticism that he privileges a certain type of pluralistic capitalist society and rejects other types of 'democracy' which are considered by their advocates, and other commentators, as equally valid. 'Sovereign' democracy and various forms of socialist and communist democracy are ruled out of the discussion as being constitutive of autocratic regimes.

Whereas many political scientists claim that electoral democracy as a political method does not entail any particular social or political 'outputs', McFaul's endorsement of democracy promotion as a policy for the U S government is based on the positive effects of democratic systems. These include economic development and the 'democratic peace'.

McFaul skilfully and persuasively marshals his argument by reference to autocracies which suffer economic and social dislocations. There are also autocracies which have high levels of growth (South Korea, the Soviet Union for many periods and contemporary China). While democracies can lead to economic growth, the relationship is not really very strong and McFaul, following the empirical study by Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheubub and Limongi, correctly concedes that there is no consistent relationship between regime type and growth.

Similar doubts may be raised about the implications of the 'democratic peace'. As McFaul points out, one of the major findings of contemporary political science is that democracies 'do not go to war with each other' (p.58). He then concludes that if the number of democratic regimes increases, then the world will be safer for Americans, thus making democracy promotion a legitimate political goal. What is overlooked here is that democracies become involved in conflicts with non-democracies and that there has been a trend for democracies to use surrogate forces to fight in foreign internal wars. While McFaul documents (and criticises) US use of military interventions and covert actions, these are not put in the context of the democratic peace argument. If we consider countries which have been involved in wars, between 1946 and 2003, the top three countries were democracies: the United Kingdom (21 armed conflicts), France with 19 and the USA with 16, followed by Russia (Soviet Union) with 9, Australia (7), Netherlands (7) and Israel (6). Moreover, African, Latin American and socialist societies also have not conducted wars within themselves, but this hardly makes them a recipe for Western nations to copy.

Study of the correlates of democracy has neither revealed very positive relationships with growth and non-violence, nor with equality and happiness, which are not discussed in the book. The criticism remains that the

causal factors, even correlations where they do exist, may have nothing or little to do with democratic mechanisms, but with other factors, such as the extent of the market, type and distribution of property, culture, effects of globalisation and the concomitant rise of multi-national corporations. Reduction of poverty and promotion of equality are, as McFaul suggests, desirable policies, but they are more likely to be achieved through social-democratic or socialist policies, which promote employment, provide state transfers and curb income from property, than the installation of democracy as such.

McFaul points to the absence of alternatives to 'democracy' in the modern world. But it makes no sense at all to cite cross-national public opinion polls on the ubiquity of 'democracy' and thus to legitimate the USA exporting its version of democracy to others. Conceptions of 'democracy' vary greatly between respondents both within and between different countries and their ideas of 'democracy' refer to different types of regimes (such as 'sovereign' democracy) or simply to a good life. 'Democracy' is not the same as clean air making it the kind of 'international public good that the United States should promote' (p.71).

McFaul calls for a reversal of policies pursued by George W. Bush. Readers may wonder how, if US democracy is such a superior system of government, as claimed in the book, such policies came into being in the first place. He also recommends a greater concern with equality, justice and 'less of the reverential focus on the individual prevalent in Anglo-American thinking' (p. 154). Clearly many of McFaul's proposals would have widespread support if they were altruistically applied. But what this book does not answer is the question of whether 'democracy promotion' is not a cloak for something else. As he points out: 'Rarely can American presidents justify the sustained occupation of another country in the name of preserving the balance of power or advancing narrow American geo-strategic interests such as access to oil or other strategic resources. Instead, the post-war objective must be a moral one, which usually involves the creation or restoration of democratic institutions... [Bush's] quest to promote democracy inside Iraq after American forces occupied the country is an old American tradition' (p.156). Many countries exposed to American 'democracy promotion' contend that the process occludes American political and economic interests, and in post-Soviet space advances the installation of neo-liberal policies – the exposure to the world market, privatisation, and de-statisation.

Readers will find this a provocative, erudite and well written book. (The copy sent for review was spoiled by the omission of some references in chapter 5). It is much stronger on policy recommendations for the Obama administration than on the political science of democracy promotion. Though partisan in argument, the author raises counter propositions and in doing so gives the reader useful references to other views. The conclusions are likely to be valuable for proponents of democracy promotion, but are unlikely to convert many sceptics.

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